

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON BRITISH ELECTION PROCEDURE

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING GENERAL BACKGROUND ON BRITISH ELECTION PROCEDURE, VOTING PRACTICES AND PRESENT STATE OF PARLIAMENT IS PROVIDED IN LIGHT OF CURRENT SPECULATION CONCERNING POSSIBILITY OF AN EARLY GENERAL ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. ELECTIONS. ANNOUNCEMENT BY A PRIME MINISTER OF DECISION TO CALL A GENERAL ELECTION IS FOLLOWED BY A ROYAL PROCLAMATION NAMING DAY ON WHICH OLD PARLIAMENT IS TO BE DISSOLVED AND DATE ON WHICH A NEW ONE WILL BE SUMMONED AFTER A GENERAL ELECTION. NORMALLY, PM'S ANNOUNCEMENT HAS PRECEDED DISSOLUTION BY ONE TO THREE WEEKS, BUT THIS IS NOT REQUIRED. ON DAY FOLLOWING DISSOLUTION, WRITS ARE ISSUED TO RETURNING OFFICERS INDICATING DAY OF ELECTION WHICH IS 17 WORKDAYS FOLLOWING ISSUANCE OF WRITS. DISSOLUTION IS USUALLY TIMED SO THAT ELECTION MAY BE HELD ON A THURSDAY. A TIMETABLE FOR A FEBRUARY 7 GENERAL ELECTION WOULD BE:

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JANUARY 18: DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT BY ROYAL PROCLAMA-

TION. JANUARY 19: RECEIPT OF WRITS TO RETURNING OFFICERS. JANUARY 24: CLOSING DAY FOR APPLICATIONS TO VOTE BY POST OR PROXY. JANUARY 28: CLOSING DAY FOR NOMINATION PAPERS AND FOR NOTIFYING APPOINTMENT OF ELECTION AGENTS. FEBRUARY 5: CLOSING DAY FOR NOTIFYING APPOINTMENT OF COUNTING AGENTS. FEBRUARY 6: CLOSING DAY FOR NOTIFYING APPOINTMENT OF POLLING AGENTS. FEBRUARY 7: POLLING DAY.

2. VOTING ELIGIBILITY. EACH YEAR IN OCTOBER NEW VOTING REGISTERS ARE COMPILED LISTING ALL THOSE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE: BRITISH SUBJECTS AND CITIZENS OF EIRE WHO ARE 18 OR OVER WHO HAVE NO LEGAL DISABILITY AND HAVE EITHER RESIDENCE OR SERVICE QUALIFICATION. THESE LISTS ARE PUBLISHED ON FEBRUARY 15 EACH YEAR AND INCLUDE NAMES OF ALL THOSE REGISTERED WHO WILL TURN 18 DURING THE 2 YEAR PERIOD FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER REGISTRATION. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE 1973 REGISTER WILL INCLUDE ABOUT 40 MILLION NAMES. COMMENT: POLITICAL PARTIES RELY HEAVILY ON VOTING REGISTERS FOR CANVASSING, ETC. WITH AN ESTIMATED 4 MILLION POTENTIAL VOTERS CHANGING ADDRESSES EACH YEAR, REGISTERS BECOME PROGRESSIVELY OUT OF DATE AFTER THEY ARE ISSUED. WITH ITS BETTER STAFFED AND PROBABLY MORE PROFESSIONAL NETWORK OF NATIONAL AGENTS AND PARTY WORKERS IN CONSTITUENCIES, ARGUMENT IS FREQUENTLY MADE THAT TORIES CAN TRACK DOWN THOSE WHO HAVE MOVED (AND WHO ARE COMING OF AGE) IN ORDER TO GET OUT VOTE MORE EFFICIENTLY THAN THEIR LABOR AND LIBERAL OPPOSITION. ON PAST PERFORMANCE, THIS IS TRUE, THOUGH ITS PRACTICAL EFFECTS ARE APPARENTLY SIGNIFICANT ONLY IN MARGINAL CASES. NEVERTHELESS, BECAUSE EVEN A SMALL SWING CAN MAKE OR BREAK A CANDIDATE IN SOME CONSTITUENCIES, LABOR PARTY HAS BEEN VERY VOCAL ABOUT TORIES TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF AN ELECTION JUST BEFORE (FEBRUARY 7 OR 14) NEW REGISTERS APPEAR.

3. COMMONS. PRESENT STATE OF PARTIES IN COMMONS IS: CONSERVATIVE--320, LABOR--286, LIBERALS--11, SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS--2, DEMOCRATIC LABOR (TAVERNE)--1, ALLIANCE PARTY--1, REPUBLICAN LABOR--1, PROTESTANT UNIONIST--1, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNITY PARTY--1 AND INDEPENDENT UNITY--1, SPEAKER AND 3 DEPUTY CHAIRMEN--4, 1 SEAT VACANT. OVERALL GOVERNMENT MAJORITY IS 15. THERE ARE NOW 630 MP'S. IN NEW PARLIAMENT THERE WILL BE 635, DUE TO A REDISTRICTING WHICH REDUCED SOME BIG CITY CONSTITUENCIES AND GAVE SUBURBAN AREAS GREATER REPRESENTATION. COMMENT: ON BASIS OF LAST ELECTION RESULTS, REDISTRICTING IS THOUGHT LIKELY TO GIVE TORIES AN ADDITIONAL 15 SEATS.

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